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INQUIRY

Topic: INSIDE THE CIA

William Casey, 70, is director of the Central Intelligence Agency. He began his intelligence career in World War II, and then served in a variety of public and private jobs, including a State Department post and as a partner in a New York City law firm. He was interviewed about the activities of the CIA for USA TODAY by free-lance writer Morgan Strong.

William Casey

Public has positive attitude about CIA

USA TODAY: What are the CIA's chief functions?

CASEY: The agency's chief function is to produce intelligence on matters of national interest that are important to the policymaking and decision-making process. We collect information through various means, including such technical means as photography, then evaluate, analyze and synthesize this information to reach judgments.

USA TODAY: Is the CIA the coordinator of all the government's intelligence activities?

CASEY: As director, I'm charged with coordinating the activities of the intelligence community, which is made up of a group of organizations including the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, Army, Navy, Air Force, the FBI, the Departments of Energy, Treasury, and State. The CIA is the primary assembler of all sources of intelligence. The CIA also has a collection role, acquiring information openly and clandestinely; other agencies also collect information.

USA TODAY: Isn't there some competition among the agencies, though?

CASEY: There's deliberate competition. We believe in competitive analysis, in the sense that we encourage the components of the community to come up with their own judgments. Then we meet in the National Foreign Intelligence Board to sort it out and reconcile differences. What we can't reconcile, we flag for the attention of the policymakers. In that sense, we encourage competition.

USA TODAY: Is there any tension among the intelligence agencies?

CASEY: Very little. Today, I'm going to meet with the heads of the agencies. We'll spend a full day sorting out problems. We meet each week to approve National Intelligence Estimates. We look for differences and if they are significant, we make clear that they exist. The only turf I have to protect is our objectivity.

USA TODAY: There were differing estimates of the strength of the defenders during the Grenada invasion. Do policymakers sometimes ignore or misinterpret information provided by the CIA?

CASEY: I don't think the Grenada example is a good one. Although there were no CIA officials on the spot, we had a number of sources on the island providing information regularly. There was never a difference in the intelligence community (regarding Cuban strength) of more than 200. Intelligence is not an exact science, and there will be differences. That's why we try to bring out the significant areas of disagreement and determine the rationale and reasons for them. There is a danger if intelligence is ignored, but we've done a lot to minimize that.

USA TODAY: How?

CASEY: We brief principal officials in government every day. We've increased the number of National Intelligence Estimates to about 50 a year, up from about 12 a year in the late 1970s. These estimates are on the table when decisions are made. Sometimes this intelligence isn't given sufficient weight by policymakers, but there is a good give and take that provides assurance that it will be looked at and understood. The best assurance ... rests in a good relationship between the intelligence people and the policy people. Now this relationship is very close.

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USA TODAY: The word CIA evokes paranoia in some people. Do you try to minimize that?

CASEY: It's not as great as generally perceived. There are tensions. Sometimes intelligence gets involved in a policy wrangle, where people who are looking for intelligence to support them criticize it if it doesn't. Some people are concerned about special activities that they think the intelligence community is not directed to engage in. But on the whole, Congress has supported these efforts. The fact that we get 250,000 applications a year from people who want to join the agency bespeaks a wide public acceptance. I think that the public attitude toward intelligence has improved materially in comparison to what it was five or six years ago.

USA TODAY: Is that paranoia ever helpful? In Nicaragua, the Sandinista government's fear of CIA activities seems to have had a substantial effect in changing that government's direction.

CASEY: It seems to have had, yes.

USA TODAY: Some say the CIA is largely an Ivy League, establishment organization. Is the agency broadly representative of our society?

CASEY: It is broadly representative. It's not as Ivy League as it was in the early days when it tended to be composed of people from the Eastern seaboard, largely people who had been in World War II and who stayed in this area of the country after the war. In addition to taking people right off the campuses, we now take people who had a few years experience in some other activity and want to change careers. We advertise. We get about 250,000 people applicants a year — this provides a good cross-section.

USA TODAY: Does the oversight function of Congress impede the agency?

CASEY: No, not significantly.

USA TODAY: Do you think oversight is necessary?

CASEY: Yes, I think it's a good thing. It gives the agency confidence in what it's doing. It gives Congress an understanding, which has translated into support. We need the support to keep up with the increasing complexity of intelligence challenges. It helps us do a better job with complex emerging technologies that permit us to handle an increasing mass of information.

USA TODAY: Is the agency relying more and more on technological information-gathering instead of human intelligence gathering?

CASEY: Yes, but you have to have both. The more information you get from technical sources, such as photography, the more urgent it is to get human intelligence for the people trying to assess what comes from technical collection. We deal with an increasingly enormous amount of factual information from technical sources, which requires more human intelligence collection and more people devoted to the analytical function.

USA TODAY: What have you done to change the agency's direction?

CASEY: I think the intelligence community works together with greater cooperation. I've focused on improving the analytical function — getting judgments on the table and getting differences defined for the policymakers. In the past, a process had developed that allowed semantics to paper over differences in order to obtain consensus. I have made decisions quickly, sharply, so that people know what they're doing and know they can get answers at the top. I think I've improved the relationship between intelligence and policymaking in a way that makes the power of intelligence relevant. Morale is high. People feel that what we are doing is valued, important and respected, and it is.

USA TODAY: One former CIA employe, Edwin Wilson, was convicted of shipping arms to Libya. How can you deal with cases that heighten public doubts about the CIA?

CASEY: That is sort of ancient history. It's always possible there will be a bad apple or that everybody will not behave the way they should. Through our inspector general, we work very hard to make people confident they can obtain good advice and guidance in adhering to the rules.

USA TODAY: In a recent speech, you suggested that the international community has to deal with human rights issues. What does the CIA have to do with that issue?

CASEY: I said that as an intelligence matter we're facing a challenge and a contest in the Third World from communist efforts to take over countries, and that communism extinguishes human rights. We have to gather intelligence on how human rights are respected in these countries and then urge them to respect rights, as part of defending themselves against the creeping imperialism of the communist world. If they don't respect human rights, that vulnerability will be exploited by the communists.

USA TODAY: Are there tensions between the intelligence agencies of our allies and the CIA?

CASEY: Every state needs intelligence. They need to know what they are facing and keep abreast of it.

USA TODAY: Isn't there an insoluble conflict between an open society that demands information and the CIA's responsibility to protect information?

CASEY: I am required by law to protect the sources and methods that the agency uses to gather information. We are accountable to Congress in certain areas. We talk clearly about those areas. But when it comes to gathering intelligence, that information is exclusively for policymakers. Then, our function is not to make information available.

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USA TODAY: How do leaks affect the CIA?

CASEY: Leaks can bring information into the public domain, which can very dramatically curtail our ability to get information. I spend a lot of time with the media, trying to get them to understand that certain kinds of information can be very damaging if they get into the public domain. On the whole, I get a reasonable amount of cooperation. When leaks do occur, there isn't much we can do about it. We deplore it. We spend a lot of time with the people in government who have access to sensitive information educating them about the importance of protecting it. We have a whole security apparatus which works toward that end.

TIMELINE: William Casey

- 1913: Born in Elmhurst, Queens, N.Y.
- 1934: Awarded a B.S. from Fordham University.
- 1937: Received law degree from St. John's University.
- 1938-1949: Served on the board of editors of the Research Institute of America.
- 1941-1946: Worked for the Office of Strategic Services, U.S. Army Intelligence.
- 1947-1948: Was special counsel for the U.S. Senate's small business committee.
- 1948-1962: Lectured at New York University.
- 1953: Wrote *Tax Shelter for the Family*, with Jacob Lasser.
- 1957-1971: Was partner of a New York law firm.
- 1973-1974: Served as undersecretary for economic affairs at the U.S. Department of State.
- 1974-1975: Was president and chairman of the USA's Export-Import Bank.
- 1976: Served on President Ford's foreign intelligence advisory board.
- 1980: Managed Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign.
- 1981: Appointed director of the CIA.

Source: *Who's Who in America*